

3601.

Rev E. B. Priestland.

P1

Manx Memories.



"Yet link by link the chain, that ties
The present to those early days,
Is breaking slowly and the haze
Is darkening over memory's skies."

circa 1900

1. THE MASTER.
2. TOM AND BETTY.
3. THE OLD IS BETTER.

E.P.

Spondon.

THE MASTER.

Has earth a sweeter joy than back to stray
From life's entanglements in other lands,
To where from fragments of our childhood life
We still can joint together the old scenes,
And paint the picture with the sacred touch
Of loving memory? Not with scornful thoughts
Of what now is, but holding present things
More sacred, as the sacred heritors
Of haunts twice sanctified by love and death.
Such joy was mine for all too short a time
Of holiday,—too short to live again
The stream of memories that floated back,
Awaked at every turning of the road
That led from town up to the village home.
The smithy at the four cross roads, welcome
To all who needed rest, or stopped to chat
With the old smith, whose tongue and anvil clanged
Amid the crowd of ploughboy gossipers.
Between the smithy and the dwelling-place
The parish boundary ran—love's Rubicon—
On the north side of which the sacred ground
Of home began; the road on either side,
Studded with memory posts, yet here and there

Were vacancies ; here a cottage gone,
 There stranger faces from some well-known house
 Gazed as I passed along, and knew me not.
 But ever, as I went, the tall church tower,
 Like Israel's pillar, rose against the sky
 And beckoned welcome ; there I knew was home,—
 The sanctuary of our love—there sleeps in peace
 The master, servant, minister, and friend.
 The master ever mindful of his own
 Master in Heaven ; the servant who himself
 Did serve as he would others' service have ;
 The minister, who taught as he had learned
 Of the great Teacher, and the friend of all
 Who knew or needed his and their true Friend.
 And lingering by his tomb my memory waked
 The day he drew me to the place, where now
 He rests, and marked the spot. " Yes lay me here
 " Close where my people pass to worship God ;
 " Perchance they'll think of me when I am gone
 " As I have thought of them." And there he lies
 Beneath the shadow of the church he loved,
 And served with all that mighty heart of love,
 That knew not self. Earth had no dearer spot
 Within the ever-widening circle of his love ;
 His week day haunt as well as Sabbath joy,
 His daily exercise to walk around
 His Zion, and in lonely midnight hour
 To sit in meditation with his God
 Within the sacred walls. His love, nay life

The habitation of God's house, the place
 Wherein His Honour dwells; his monument,
 The tall square tower that men his "Folly" called,
 But he his *Deo Soli Gloria*;
 Content that he had made this House of God
 More worthy of its use. Friend never came
 (And who came once that failed to come again?)
 But after kindly hospitality must go
 And see the church, the centre of a heart
 That throbbed with love for all his Island Church.
 None found a surer entrance to that love,
 Than those who served her or desired to serve.
 And if such service came from one home-born
 Within the Isle, it were sure of welcome,
 And more than welcome: never tenderer tact
 Felt round the circumstance of would-be-priest,
 And paved the path to service with the means
 To fit him for the work—yet practical,
 As ever, he would test the newborn zeal
 By possible objections, quaintly phrased,
 "No cock can crow his best in his own yard;
 I knew his father—didn't he work for me?"
 And such impediments of social life
 To higher service, drawn from his rich store
 Of life's experience, to himself mere noughts
 When face to face with the true ring of worth.
 His sacred office gave him place among
 Those who did rule the state. Wise counsellor
 Of broadening freedom; not averse to change

If change wrought betterment, yet loyally
 Would use the past to make the present good.
 True patriot and priest! No scorn too stern
 For those who fain would wed his Island Church
 To mainland sees, and rob her bishopric
 Of gold too little for her native wants.
 A patriot priest and priestly patriot
 When common danger threatened Church and Isle.
 And still within his orb of public life
 Concentric orbs in perfect harmony
 Revolved—the love of neighbour and of home.
 There you must know the master, would you trace
 The source of that undying memory,
 That lives still fresh throughout the neighbourhood,
 Like fragrant scent that lingers in a room
 When flowers are dead. The state of Fatherhood
 Was never his, but his in fullest right
 That power of Fatherhood, which love begets,
 When woven in the service of a life
 That centred every home in his, and his
 In theirs—a power as spiritual and rich
 In all our lives, as that quaint eloquence
 With which he humanized the truth of God
 In Sabbath sermon. Master never bound
 In stronger or in longer bonds of love
 His servants to him—Girlhood's raven locks
 Grew grey in love and service—death alone
 Breaking the bond, and youth through manhood's years
 Served till the back was bent and head was bowed.

And as each yearly term of service came,
'Twas marked by some small gift of gratitude
As suited best the wants or tastes of those
Who served. Oft have I found in after days
These mortgages of love in cottage homes
Of those, whose marriage had been blest by him.
No treasure dearer ; " Yes, the Master gave
Me these," and that enough to give them worth.
Rev'rence forbids to bare the inner scenes
Of that home life, which only those, who lived
Within, could realize in its full depth
Of perfect masterhood ; rights won by love
Were paid again in kind, and duty done
Was paid by duty ; thus in circling stream,
Unbroken by the roughness of command
Or lack of service, ran the common life.
Around this inner circle of home love
Lay parish duties. He, true parish priest
As well as preacher, found his sacred work
In all that filled his people's daily lives.
The messenger of peace to dying men,
The arbiter of peace in family strife
Or social bickerings, all content that he
Should sit in judgment, all content to bow
To love and justice blended, sure that he
The Master would do right. No wiser friend
In worldly business. Scribe and lawyer too,
Some gift to charity his only fee.
And thus he grew entwined in all their life

By human service. While behind the man
 Stood vigilant and true the priest of God,
 Who knew to temper truth to circumstance,
 Yet sternly loyal in the fight with sin
 Could wrestle with the unrepentant heart
 With darts keen-tipped from out the Book of Life.
 In all his thoughts none held more constant place
 Than those who needed most. His Master's word
 "The poor are ever with you," was his creed
 In act, not with unreasoning charity,
 That makes the gift productive of more need,
 And breaks the barrier down of self respect;
 But after knowledge gained of circumstance
 (The right hand knowing not what left hand did)
 The gift was suited, both in kind and sum,
 To most advantage; thus in prudence girt
 Did love disarm necessity of law.
 On either side of home lay Church and School,
 The fittest parable of his life's work
 And earliest love. If ever pride did rise,
 It rose when, reaching back in memory,
 He told how once the Royal Widowed Queen
 Did come and see and praise in gracious words,
 Where first in his first parish he did draw
 To school the infants, and with pride would shew
 The sacred volume, gift from Royal hands,
 Inscribed with due approval of his work.
 The school in deepest hollows of his heart
 Embowered lay; by him slight difference

Was held in secular or sacred lore,
 For all was sacred ; to no festival
 In parish life was greater honour paid
 Than when the school held yearly carnival,
The tea party then called, a twelve months' dream,
 Where all was joy, and he the central joy
 For child or friend or casual visitor.
 And so through all their ways he lived and moved
 Giving and gathering sweetness through them all,
 Till, laden with their love, he downward went
 The slope of life, and, when the sunset came,
 'Twas but the fading of another joy
 Into "the joy unspeakable and full "
 Of glory." Not all dark, for through the cloud
 The after glow still floats across the Isle.

* The text he was constantly repeating in his last few days.

TOM AND BETTY.

In summer holiday we sought again
The shores health-breathing of our Island home.
Elsewhere we live, but home is where our love
First drew us close to those who first loved us.
And thither turning, ere another day
Had died in crimson splendour over Jurby head,
We soon were resting, where our dear ones rest,
Still held in loving memory for their love
And service to their neighbours and to God.
There, since we last had visited the place,
Two old dear souls had entered into rest.
Last year we found them sitting in the sun,
Together on one seat, at gable of the house,
Tom holding Betty's hand in wordless love.
Bowed down with years of honest loyal toil,
Like sickle bent and worn, Tom sat and gazed,
And Betty prattled, like as was her wont,
Of things, that long were past, wherein she lived.
So loth was I to break upon their peace,
That long I stood in silence, half concealed
Behind a currant tree. To me they were
The sole remaining links of boyhood life
With scenes still sanctified and clear through years
Of exile. Tom and I one master served

And loved, for he, though Master, served and loved
 In equal measure. Tom the garden wrought
 Not with artistic skill, but patient toil;
 Yet never have I seen such rich return.
 He loved the garden, and it loved him back
 In wealth of produce: branches weighed to ground
 With clustered berries, many as the leaves,
 (The more unpruned, the richer seemed the fruit)
 Enough for all our feasting, and for birds,
 And all who came to feast unbidden there.
 And often Tom would linger patiently,
 Resting on handle of his gleaming fork,
 While robin perching on the other end,
 Devoured the upturned worm; then Tom
 Would brush him off and talking as to child,
 "Come, Bobby, come, theer waitin in the house
 "For priddhas," and the bird would hop away,
 And let the old man fill his *dhollan* full
 Of large potatoes, white, and clean, and round,
 Such as was his as well as Mona's pride.
 One yearly grief sore vexed the old man's heart;
 The boys were fond of apples, and would scour
 The gardens, more in boyish sport than theft;
 And sad it was to see Tom's black despair
 Standing at morn beneath the rifled tree;
 "*Aw dear, aw dear, theer's not-wan lef! the dirts!*
 "*The jeel that's on the three! it's all bruk down*
 And "*I mus tell the Misthress, she'll be keigh.*"
 The old man's face to me, behind the bush,

Brought wave on wave of memories ; pictured there
 The gardens lived again, and he in them.
 The old well-garden, sloping to the west,
 (The well was in the corner arched with ferns)
 On one hand of the loosely gravelled walk
 The berries and the currants, *kishans* full ;
 The other carpeted with strawberries, red and white,
 The forage ground of blackbirds and us boys,
 The walls festooned with apples and with pears ;
 Three pear trees faced towards the southern sun,
 And next a straggling fig tree, whereon grew
 Nothing but leaves ; beneath the pear trees stood
 A row of hives, and all the vacant spots
 Were filled with plots of cabbages and leeks.
 Whenever we were missing, thither first
 They sought us, and they rarely failed to find.
 Above this stretched a lawn shaded with trees,
 Chestnut and sycamore, and all beyond
 Along the road, which led up to the church,
 The kitchen garden—old Tom's dearest haunt,
 For there the *priddhas* grew—and then below
 Orchard and drying ground, whereon the girls
 Hung out the clothes, or waved their signs of love
 To simple swains that passed along the road,
 Which ran before the cottage where Tom lived.
 A neighbour passing through the gate, that creaked,
 Broke up my dreaming, and old Tom looked round :
 And oh the joy he took—" *Aw man alive*
 " *You've come at las ; the well your lookin shure !*

"And how's the misthress? are the childher heer?"

"They're growin big I'm thinkin; aw the boghs!"

"The gel! she was the bhoy: aw, full of thricks"

"And clishen like an eel. How many's at yer?"

"Yer mus be stoppin tay—theer's white bread in"

"And bonnag too; come in, come in, who knows,

"Mibbe yel navar come again and see old Thobm."

"I'm failin terble and this woman too,

"She's gettin wake, and futhery killyeh like"

"At times, but come, sit down and have a coosh."

And so we entered, Betty lagging on

Scarce yet aware or who or whence I was;

At last unravelling memory's tangled skein

She grasped my hand in both her withered palms;

Then one relaxing stroked my either cheek,

And tears of joy rolled down her furrowed face,

Prattling a jumble of the present and the past.

"Aw yes I'm failin and this man is too,

"We'll go together—near the journey end.—"

"It's rest we're wantin, bhoy—nex year yel come"

"And find us restin gran, where Misthress is,

"And Masther too—aw, full and perfeck rest!"

And so we chatted, looping up the past,

And Jurby head again concealed the sun

Before we faltered out our last good-bye.

And here they're resting; Tom had died away

Like wavelet floating noiselessly to shore,

And Betty could not stay; a few short days

Again the portal opened to eternal rest.

THE OLD IS BETTER.

Old Bill is dead, dropped from the ranks of those
 Who serve in nooks and corners of God's world;
 Their service and themselves alike unknown
 In this parading world. God knows their worth
 And they know God; with that content they live
 And die; the bustling world rolls on its way
 Unconscious that some virtue has gone out,
 One flower less along its thorny path.
 Sweet home-spun saint! around his quiet life
 Breathed peace, and his the healthy saintliness
 Of honest work in fold and cattle byre.
 He served his God by patting children's heads,
 And found an altar at the widow's hearth
 Whose husband long had ploughed in company
 Life's furrow side by side. No scholar he,
 Save with that living scholarship which heart,
 Not head, can delve from out the book of God,
 And preach in simple words and faithful life.
 With old-world ways on every Sabbath morn
 He sought the Parish Church, and every eve
 Went wandering to some lowly meeting house,
 To feed his fellows with the simple bread
 On which he fed himself—the love of God
 Through man to man. To him all life was God;

Worship was work and work was worship too ;
 One spirit breathed through both ; the daily task
 Was sacred with an equal sacredness
 To service offered on the bended knee.
 On others' lips, whose lives were not in tune
 With harmony so sweet, Bill's homely talk
 Would have a flippant sound, but all, who knew
 The lived-out worship of his daily life,
 Found grace in all his phrases howe'er quaint.

His Sabbath work, late in the dying year,
 Once took him to a far off mountain shrine,
 Where a few country folk at intervals—
 Some two or three together—worshipped God.
 His message was the woman's place and power
 To sweeten and complete the life of home.
 And, as his wont was ever, to the Book
 He took them straight, and such his native speech—
 "Aw what is life without a wife at home ;
 "Theer's nawthin right without a woman in ;
 "Jus look at Adam—everything he liked
 "Close at his han—a garden full of threes
 "Wis goolden apples at them—berries
 "Kishans full, and every three was pleasant
 "To the sight and good for food—and sthrames
 "Of wather handy—and the land was full
 "Of goold and stones theer callin bdellium to,
 "And onyx, grandher far nor Laxer mines.
 "And theer was Adam ; all he hed to do

" Was jus sthravag aroun, and kape it clane
 " And dhress it. Well one day He thought He'd like
 " To see how Adam, the poor bough, was gettin on ;
 " And so He sent them messengers with wings,
 " That's always roun us, down to see the place
 " An come an tell Him ; and so, down they went.
 " Twas Sathurday—and aw ! they found the man
 " Longin morthal, and lazy coughthy too ;
 " Nawthin done arrim, not a cow was milked,
 " No wather in, and not a bonnag baked,
 " Nor the house claned, all futhey-killyeh like.
 " And so they towl Him. Then He made a wife
 " And sent her to him. Aw the joy he took,
 " Poor Adam ! When them fellars came again,
 " Twas gesh—the Sunday wather in, the house
 " Was clane ; the bonnags and the cakes was baked,
 " And them two sittin in the chollagh close,
 " Havin a coosh, and Ave was sowin laves
 " To make her man a dacent Sunday shuit.
 " Aw, brethren, every good and perfeck gift
 " Comes from above, the place that Ave came from.
 " A dacent wife is one of God's bess gifts,
 " A slok of heaven let in this wickad world."
 Well Bill's put under now ; God rest his soul !
 There's lots of preachers, but not one like Bill.